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Patty Berg



www.assembly.ca.gov/berg

Dear Friends,

Here we are in one of the busiest times of the year, when the days are at their shortest and our to-do lists are at their longest.

We have plans to make, parties to attend, and dear old friends to keep in touch with.

There are get-togethers at work, at school, and in our volunteer organizations. There's just so much to do.

For me, it's a final respite before the busy legislative year kicks off in earnest next month. And as you know there is no shortage of serious work to be done in Sacramento. Forget about all the partisan back-and-forth, we all have a job to do and I like to think we're all going to be very serious about doing it.

Once again, the budget is going to be Job 1. In just a matter of weeks, we'll get a look at the governor's proposal. He has promised a budget that will close a \$7 billion deficit without raising taxes. We will wait and see. Right now, I'm not insisting that anything be ruled in or ruled out.

Those are discussions for another day. Now is the time to think through what is most important to us. Now is the time to be near to the ones we love.

And now is the time for me to wish you and yours a very happy and healthy holiday season. Until next year!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Patty Berg".

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The Budget Challenge That Won't Go Away

In just a matter of weeks, the governor will deliver his budget proposal for the 2005-2006 fiscal year.

To meet his constitutional requirement of providing a balanced spending plan, the governor will have to bridge a gap between spending and revenue that has been estimated at more than \$7 billion.

Last year, the compromise budget relied on a mixture of postponed obligations, borrowing, revenue shifting and some difficult spending reductions.

It's unlikely that we'll be able to continue to borrow and juggle our way out this year. That's what the Legislature's nonpartisan financial analyst tells us. ([See Fiscal Outlook](#))

Once again, Republican senators and

Assembly members say they'll oppose any solution that involves raising revenue. And the governor's new budget chief has said the same thing.

So Democrats will have to wait and see. Frankly, I'll be very happy if we can balance the books using only the money we have now.

Interestingly, the nonpartisan Legislative Analyst has recently issued another [report](#), which shows, among other things, that Californians owe more than \$6 billion in taxes than they pay. So maybe we'd be okay if we could just collect the taxes already on the books.

The report cites a combination of underreported income, underpaying and failure to file a return.

The nonpartisan Legislative Analyst predicts that state revenues will climb to \$82.2 billion in the coming fiscal year. Unfortunately, expenditures will reach \$89.5 billion – creating a \$7.3 billion hole.

Physician Aid-in-Dying for the Terminally ill

In a couple months, I plan to introduce a bill that would legalize physician aid-in-dying for the terminally ill.

I intend to co-author this bill with my dear friend Lloyd Levine, a fellow Assembly member from Van Nuys.

This bill will be modeled after Oregon's Death with Dignity Act, the voter-approved measure that gave residents there the right to ease their passing.

I like to say that we put more effort into planning a two-week vacation than we do planning our own deaths. That's amazing, since the only thing we know for sure is that we are going to die one day. And when that day comes, I want to

know that I can control my death in the same way I control my life.

Before Assembly member Levine and I introduce our measure, we're going to hold a pair of hearings, so that we can make sure our bill addresses concerns that some people may have.

The first hearing will be in Los Angeles next month, dealing with the issues and concerns raised by persons with disabilities.

We'll also have a hearing in San Francisco in February dealing with competency. We'll look at safeguards that prevent a depressed patient from deciding to end their life.

Keeping Promises on HIV and Hepatitis-C

It's painful and frustrating to know that Californians continue to contract HIV when we know so clearly how to prevent its spread.

The same is true of Hepatitis-C.

Both diseases find easy targets among intravenous drug users. And the harder we make it for these unfortunate addicts to obtain sterile needles, the easier we make it for these scourges to spread.

That's why I plan to reintroduce my bill to make it easier for cities and counties to operate legal needle exchange programs.

At the end of the last legislative session, the governor vetoed my exchange bill. But in doing so, he also offered to revisit the issue this year. So, I'm going to take him up on that, and will push for a workable solution.

A Personal Victory for Journeyman Ralph Nelson

Ralph Nelson has prevailed where others have failed. He has stuck it out where others have given up.

And his hard work, patience and efforts have paid off.

Ralph Nelson this month became the first Eureka-area resident to earn the status of Journeyman Steamfitter since 1988.

Many years ago, there were plenty of opportunities for folks like Ralph to rise through the union ranks and earn their way to the top. But that was when there were a lot more industrial jobs.

These days, steamfitter jobs are a bit more rare. And that made it hard to amass his required 8,000 job hours.

But he did it anyway, gaining his final hours came from a cogeneration project at California State University, Humboldt. He helped build the energy-saving system there that takes the heat from electric generators and uses it to warm classrooms and offices.

Ralph Nelson has shown a level of commitment and determination that would make anyone proud, and I told him so.

He has lived in Eureka since 1980, and

raised two children here, a daughter who has since moved to Canada, and a son who serves as a Marine deployed to Iraq.

It took years longer to amass his hours here than it might have somewhere else.

Sid Berg (no relation), of the United Association of Plumbers and Steamfitters Local 290, says most people leave the area to get the work they need to become a journeyman.

But not Mr. Nelson.

He says he's got "obligations" here. "Like family."



Patty Berg presents Eureka steamfitter Ralph Nelson with an official certificate to mark his elevation to journeyman in his trade.

Moving Ahead: Third Master Plan Report Due Soon

Over the last few months, I've been working on the development of the Master Plan on Aging.

In October, I spoke to the California Social Work Education Center in Long Beach, the Commission on Aging, and the California Association of Area Agencies on Aging. Each event gave us a chance to share our progress and gather valuable insight from both service providers as well as older adults.

Next month, I'll be releasing the third report of the Master Plan on Aging, which will provide a timeline for passing laws and changing policies over the next six years. Of course, given the budget deficit, sweeping changes won't be fiscally possible during the next year. However, there are several Master Plan on Aging issues that will be moving forward during the 2005-06 Session.

Health care, elder financial abuse, caregiver support, and the affordability of

prescription drugs will all be topics of legislation.

The Assembly Committee on Aging and Long-Term Care, which I chair, will also be holding informational hearings on issues ranging from end-of-life care to geriatrics in higher education.

Let the Sun Shine In on Campaign Funds

Secrecy and democracy don't mix. And yet there seems to be a growing number of groups that don't believe that. They want to run dirty-trick advertising campaigns and do it anonymously. In our state, they're using a loophole in the campaign finance law.

That's why I've joined with state Sen. Dean Florez to pass a law that requires groups to tell the voters who they are and where they get their money.

December is Universal Human Rights Month

Back in 1948, as the world sought to give meaning to the horror of World War II, the emerging United Nations set forth a series of articles about human rights, and they named December Universal Human Rights Month.

The list of rights is, unfortunately, not as long as the list of the oppressors who seek to trample them.

Here's a truncated version of those universal rights:

All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights; no distinction of rights may be made by race, sex, language, religion, opinion, origin,

property, birth or other status; everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person; no one shall be held in slavery or servitude; no one shall be subjected to torture, cruel, inhuman or degrading punishment; everyone shall be recognized everywhere as a person before the law; everyone has the right to an effective remedy by the competent national tribunals; no arbitrary arrest, detention or exile; everyone has the right to open and fair trials; rights to privacy of family and home; as well as freedom of movement.

Something to think about.

Nine out of 10 children who are sexually abused know the abuser, with almost half of the offenders being a family member. Of sexual assaults against people age 12 and up, approximately 80% of the victims know the offender. Experts say be aware, be alert, and be open with your kids.

California's Megan's Law Internet Site Up and Running

Our state Attorney General Bill Lockyer has announced that his office has begun operating the Megan's Law Website.

The web site provides detailed information about the identities and whereabouts of 63,000 registered sex offenders in the state.

Specific home addresses are displayed on more than 33,500 offenders in the California communities; as to these persons, the site displays the last registered address reported by the offender. An additional 30,500 offenders are included on the site with listing by ZIP Code, city, and county. Information on approximately 22,000 other offenders is not included on this site, but is known to law enforcement personnel.

The Megan's Law Website is at <http://www.meganslaw.ca.gov/>

Coffee Break

State Capitals

G M O U W A B S Z B I H M F E
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Words can be written diagonally, bottom to top or backwards.